



HB0396 - Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of the
House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 11, 2021 1:30 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee to issue **a favorable report on HB0396 - Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program**, sponsored by Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice: three issues with long, interconnected histories to the public health practice of harm reduction. The current opioid epidemic profoundly impacts the lives of thousands of Marylanders each year, including those who are pregnant and parenting. These Marylanders, and many more, would greatly benefit from the harm reduction practices and security offered by HB0396. According to the Center for Disease Control, Maryland has the third highest rate of overdose deaths in the United States, falling behind only West Virginia and Delaware.¹ Governor Hogan himself declared a national emergency in regard to the opioid epidemic in 2014 and since then, opioid use and overdoses have continued to pose a threat to public health.

Marylanders struggling with addiction continue to be forced into unsafe practices of using unsterile equipment that can transfer disease. Many are forced to use these illegal substances in unsafe, isolated places in order to avoid legal repercussions. Using in these locations can leave folks struggling with addiction – including pregnant people – vulnerable to death if they overuse, as well as sexual violence while under the influence in an unsafe, deserted area.

Having access to an Overdose Prevention Site would ensure that more Marylanders would be offered sterile equipment for their pre-obtained drugs, would be attended to in the case of an overdose, and would have access to constant monitoring in a safe and secure medical facility. It eliminates the threat of predators preying on people who are unconscious while under the influence and introduces the possibility to recovery services, testing for specific diseases they may have contracted through needle sharing, and even reproductive health education services. We are hopeful that staff at these sites will be trained to assist pregnant people, so that more will come to seek help at such facilities, rather than risk poor health outcomes for fear of criminalization.

Overall, this legislation will enhance the lives of those struggling with addiction and allow them access into a safer and medically monitored drug usage to reduce opioid related deaths and diseases. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0396**. Thank you for your time and consideration

¹ "Drug Overdose Deaths," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 19, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>